

Growing Pains

by Penn Langley

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Summary: Her mother once told her that everyone had the four elements in them. Too much fire made you angry. That was her father when he played Pai Sho with General Iroh; quick to rise when he lost. Too much air and you bent easily to force. Like Anna. Too much earth and you never bent to fate. This was Zuko who stalked the earth, drawing his own destiny. Fem!Harry

1. Dead End

Many moons will lighten the way

>And sure this night will follow a day

>And everything you once loved remains

Unbroken, Birdy

* * *

><p>Anna does not remember much of her pervious life. Sometimes it comes in flashes, a flash of green and a woman's scream, a hall with the night sky as it's ceiling, a golden ball fluttering before her face, a faceless man with red eyes. There is warmth in her memories but it warps into a darkness so deep she can no longer find herself. The clearest of memories is a wand snapping in two, a stone falling to the ground, a silver cloak wrapped around her shoulders that shines like the stars.<p>

* * *

><p>Anna Zoeller grows up in Shu Jing, 500 miles east of Caldera City, in a cliffside estate with her father. Shu Jing is a painter's paradise, an author's muse, and a nobleman's retreat. Hills and cliffs are covered in glittering emerald grass. Tiny houses made of white stone that glimmer like pillars of marble, bright red flags hanging like nooses from lampposts, a shadow growing up above as

death's hands seize the mountain top.<p>

The estate she lives in smells of jasmine, the outer wall are made of gleaming marble with shiny red shingles line the rooftop. Books are strewn throughout the house, on top of tables and trunks and floors. Anna's dolls stand silent on the kitchen table still dressed in rags of tattered lace.

Her earliest memories are the sparest. Lines stretching from church doors to the road outside of town, windows boarded up, men brawling over the last loaf of bread, which sells for two gold coins. Flu enters every house in winter, death following soon after. Meat comes only from the men hunting in the forests. Milk is a memory. On the worst days, her mother boils potato peels and they eat the broth. Her father always gives her half.

None of this matters to Anna. Her eyes and heart are hungry for the world. She devours it whole. Every morning her mother wakes her up to say goodbye to her father. Her eyes blink wearily through sleep, her thin blue blanket hanging around her shoulders like a cape, her father kneeling in front of her. His eyes crinkle when he smiles, a strong hand guiding her into a warm hug.

"What will it be today?"

"A pink one, please, daddy." He laughs. He pulls her close, lips resting on her forehead, eyes shining bright. He whispers for only her to hear, "For you, the world and nothing less." He sends her off promises of another smooth pebble that gleams like glass in his eyes.

Afterwards, when he's gone to ask for a day's work, when he's busy hunting down her meaningless treasures, she sits with her mother in the garden beneath the sweet summer breeze. Sometimes she draws. She saves a single piece of charcoal to draw on scraps ripped from the backs of books. She dreams of fog filled mornings, of buildings pressed against one another to fend off the cold, of iron rising in the skyline. She does not tell her mother of the fires she's seen burning through Ba Sing Se and Omashu. She draws the cities whole, bridges connecting on the over walls, people drinking tea in the afternoon sun.

Other days, she spends hiding in the trees. Worms crawling over her toes as she digs her feet into the soft dirt. Fireflies coming out at dusk, dancing around her head. Anna doesn't know how it happens. She's lying on the ground, the sun in her eyes, her mother humming a tune near her. There's a pleasant buzzing beneath her skin, fire crawling up her arms, a whisper in the air and then it's in her hand. It waves in the wind, ebbing with life immeasurable. Her mother stutters, a yell escaping her mouth as she rushes forward. On her knees in front of Anna, she looks on as Anna builds the flame higher and lets it float out in front of her. Her mother's face is full of childish excitement, eyes wide, lips pulled into a grin so big her face aches.

"Again, do it again," her mother watches in awe as Anna lights all the lanterns in the garden before putting them out. There's a shriek of laughter as her warm arms encompass Anna holding her tightly. Anna leans into the embrace, smelling the cherry blossom that lingers on her mother's skin.

"I love you so much," she whispers in the dark. Warmth blossoms in Anna's chest and a knot grows threatening to make her cry. The faceless woman is back, flowering behind her eyes but Anna pushes her away. This is real and warm and alive.

"I love you too, mom."

* * *

><p>At night she dreams of the other world. The women's hair is a brilliant red, less flame and more burning lava. There's a girl with dark skin and wild hair whose eyes go bright as she gestures towards a book, the redhead next to her laughs heartily at something she says. Anna doesn't know how it's possible but her heart aches for these strangers. She wakes up gasping when the girl falls towards the ground, a burning castle behind her.<p>

Another nights it's a man with shaggy hair and a brilliant, taunting grin. Lights hit the back walls and a woman with coiled hair piled atop her head chases after her. A shadowy veil stands in front of her, whispers leaking out in a jumbled mess. The man falls; grin fading before he's gone. Anna screams.

* * *

><p>In the evenings she shows her father how easy it is to make light from fire. She burns crisp white paper, watching as it rises in the air slightly before falling. She sits watching her father's steady hands mold new life into steel as they listen to her mother read the paper. Her father prefers the rich stories of generals and soldiers fighting in the Earth Nation. Anna likes listening to her mother's soothing voice transform as she read plays. A man writes rapt with wonder, containing a strength that Anna has never heard from another person. "Is it possible," he asks, "_that the people of the Fire Nation are rising anew? Courage and conviction and loyalty grow in the hearts of everyone. Is it not time that we stand together, aided by faith in the Fire Lord, to rid ourselves of foreign enemies_?"

Anna sees the newfound faith in the Fire Nation. Her father comes home earlier, happier. Unemployment drops as the war effort grows anew, her neighbors get a dog and come home wearing robes of silk. There are men that come in fancy carriages, polished gold. They buy homes; their children swim in the lakes before they disappear back into the city. Duck and chicken and goose- things Anna hardly remembers appear on the table. Father buys her new dresses made of blue silk, pearls lining the collar.

One day, her mother wakes her up early, before the sun has streaked the sky with light. There's a new dress on her bed, pale pink silk that floats like a cloud. She dresses her as she struggles to stay awake. Dress, stockings, coat. Anne does not question her mother as she fixes her hair into a neat braid. Her father wanders around the house, suitcase in hand as he pulls pictures off the wall. He carries her half asleep into a carriage. Her eyes are closed before it starts to move, rumbling like a giant beast breathing in night air. When she wakes, her father's coat is wrapped around her smelling like pine trees and smoke. Her father sits beside her, a glass full of amber in one hand and his voice a soothing rasp. Her mother's head rests on

his shoulder, her hair fanning out behind her like rich honey.

There's a man dressed in a sharp suit, a red that seems to suck the light out of the room, a black band is tied around his arm.

"Daddy?" she questions, her voice cracking sharply. The man turns, black hair gleaming in the light. Fresh ashes and coal and the stones around a volcano. A shadow is the only thing she can think of.

"I am here."

"Where are we?" Her father's hand strokes through her hair, undoing her braid. Anna struggles to keep her eyes open.

"We're going to the Capital. I've gotten a new job."

"Will we be there soon?" she mumbles, slipping quietly into the black abyss of sleep. She doesn't hear her father's reply.

* * *

><p>She is nine when she meets the Prince. It is a blurry memory, more dream than remembrance. His eyes are a warm gold that crinkle when he smiles, his hand tugging at hers. Anna is entranced when he makes a wisp of fire in his palm before gently pushing it into her hands. It's hot and angry in her tiny hands. Magic but, stronger. It is alive with power, nothing like the flames she makes. Hers are a gentle, summer breeze, the sun in spring. The Prince is winter winds, harsh and biting cold, a fire eating wood and melting stone. He smiles and Anna smiles back, a wide toothy grin. She doesn't know what to name this feeling.<p>

Full.

She feels full.

2. In the Light

_ Time, give me my yesterdays _

>Save it for all you had in your eyes, I have gone away

In the Light, The Lumineers

* * *

><p>"To whom do we owe our loyalty, our strength, and our pride?" the man stands at the front, his Fire Nation uniform, creaseless and bright. Anna watches the other children that stand straight, pillars of steel stuck in their spines. Her father's hand is tight on her shoulder and when she looks up she sees the strained smile on his face.<p>

"To the Fire Lord," the students repeat, in a perfect unison that only comes from practice. She can feel her mother shuffling behind her, the children standing unblinking; a soldier's tune playing in her head. This is startlingly familiar, an ache in her left hand that leaves her scratching at an invisible scare. _I must not tell lies.

—

Her father guides them out of the room, blank eyes promising nothing, pleasant smile directed at the principal of the school.

"We'll be back," he lies, her mother stifles a laugh. Anna hopes the school burns down. The capital is nothing like she's imagined it. It's small and cramped, full of nobles trying to get the better of each other. It's a city of blind people who see the war as nothing but a map lined with toy soldiers. Anna remembers the ache in her belly, the gnawing hunger, and thinks these people soft, docile.

"What a bunch of losers," her father says with a mocking smile on his face as he performs a fire nation salute. He looks silly in the stiff, red uniform. The gold threading that lines the crest on his left breast is the only thing that Anna likes about the uniform. A dragon, their family crest. It's like looking at the sun rising.

"Can you imagine doing that everyday? My arm would fall off."

"I think, I'd barf," her mother replies.

"I'd faint."

"Die and I'll make sure they write that it was because of my devotion to the Fire Lord."

"And what about your dear husband?"

"If he knows what's good for him, he'll be dead right after me."

"Hear that, Anna. Your mother's going to kill me." Anna laughs a loud bubbly sound that echoes through the courtyard. Years later when she remembers this, she'll think of the wrinkles on her mother's face caused from years of laughter, her father's hand enclosed in hers. She'll think that this was happiness, undiluted by loss, untouched by the knowledge of pain.

* * *

><p>The palace is big. It sits in the middle of the crater, spreading outward until its edges touch the corners. Gleaming shingles line the roof, columns of deep red glazed with gold, a courtyard with smooth pale stones sits in the middle. There are trees everywhere, cherry blossoms lining garden paths, flowers blooming in the depths of winter. It is a firebender's retreat, a fortress, and a home to the Prince and Princess. Anna cannot imagine living in it.<p>

Her father is dressed in a new uniform, a deep black suit lined with silk. A General's garbs. Their dragon is still there, a bright sliver that stands out amongst the coal black wool. It is a sign of their return, a rebirth after years of exile. Her mother's hand is sweaty in hers, a nervous tremor running through her body. Anna isn't scared. She thinks it's because of the man in her dreams, the one that hunts her to the ends of the earth, to the brink of death. This lord, Lord Ozai, can only kill her. There is nothing else he can take. Nothing, at least, that hasn't been stolen before.

Prince Zuko waits for her in the gardens. Her mother is hesitant to

let her go but the gleam in Anna's eyes is enough for her grip to lessen. She thinks that Zuko has been waiting for her. His hesitant smile greets her, as she gets closer. There is no one else there other than servants tending to the plants. She has yet to meet his sister.

In these early days of friendship the Prince is quiet. He lets Anna talk to her hearts desire. He listens as she describes her old home, the commoners that were as close as blood, the wide expanse of green that made up her home. It is odd for Anna to talk so much. She finds it enjoys it more than she thought she would. She does not ask why he glances warily toward the dark halls of the palace. She imagines his sister stalking the halls, a dragon looking for a hunt. She will not give it to her.

* * *

><p>It is when Zuko falls, when his ankle give out twisting to the side, that it happens. Anna is the first near him, his mother sitting too far away. Her dress is stained green as she kneels to the ground, her hands pulling him up until he's sitting.<p>

This is not fire, not warmth and sun. This is power, lightening in her bones, and magic in her blood, strong enough that it rips through her body. She feels it again, that buzzing beneath her skin, like something is living inside of her trying to get out. Her hands are at Zuko's ankle, a gentle pressure pushing past the pain. She feels the burning in his leg, gold at the edge of her eyes before it all fades away. She blinks, swallowing back tears. He's fine, his ankle no longer at an inhuman angle, his cries silenced. It's as if there was no fall. Anna sees it now. She knows how longing has turned into truth.

His mother kneels down next to them as Anna helps Zuko up.

She looks at the prince, meeting his stunned eyes. There is awe plastered over his face, hidden in the lines by his lips, swirling in the amber of his eyes. He can't tell. She whispers it in her head, over and over, hoping he hears. Her lips are a tight line, frozen shut with the realization of what she's done, of what they can make her do.

* * *

><p>The nightmares come worse. Sirius and Hermione and Ron. Lists and lists in her head. Dead and not dead. It is all her old life amounts to. Magic and horror and hunger and death. She doesn't want it. In her dreams the cold, smooth stone rests in her hand. A black so deep, it is an absence of light. Even the gleaming streaks of moonlight bend around it. She turns it thrice. It is not Lily Evans, she sees. She doesn't know who this is. A strong jaw, broad nose and wide lips. He looks familiar but Anna cannot place his face. She can't remember if he's from that world or this one. She wakes in a cold sweat, water dripping down her face, something heavy in her hand. She doesn't open it.<p>

* * *

><p>"How did you do it?" he asks, the second they are alone. Anna glances at him, the baby fat around his jaw, the determined edge in

his narrowed eyes. She doesn't want to lie. Not to him.<p>

"I don't know," she shrugs. The letter is clear in her mind. Parchment and thick green ink. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"Are you a waterbender," Zuko leans in closely, his nose nearly pressed against hers and whispers, "Are you the avatar?"

"Don't be stupid," she snaps, pulling away. "I don't know how it happened. It just did."

"I won't tell anyone," his eyes are wide, honest, mouth held in a tight line. Somehow she knows she can trust him.

"I can do other things too," she offers, watching the Prince lean forward in excitement. Her hands wrap around the green blub of a flower. Spring has not yet hit the Capital and everything is stuck in the void of space between living and dying. Her fingers tingle, the blood freezing and then rushing forward. When she opens her hand the blub has bloomed into a white flower with five petals. She hands it to the Prince.

"You can't tell."

"I won't," he swears. He never does.

* * *

><p>She spends her afternoons with Zuko, sometimes he teaches her new firebending techniques but mostly they play around with Anna's powers. She knows somewhere deep in her mind what she can do. She makes flowers bloom, change colors, close up and fly away as butterflies. There's a sense of wonder surrounding the blossoming garden. She feels finally like a child, playing with her new friend, having little secrets between them, giggling behind columns as they play tricks on his cousin. Zuko is fun. He is her first friend.<p>

"What are you doing," she asks, walking towards the small pond Zuko sits by. The water is a cool, clear blue. It shimmers in the summer sun like glass. Zuko glances at her, smile tugging at his lips as he hands her a piece of bread.

"Feeding the turtle ducks. Here try," he breaks off a piece, throwing it towards the ground gently. Anna watches, seeing the bright yellow feathers of a turtle duck emerge from the trees. They are small with dark green shells on their backs and small rounded beaks. She repressed the urge to squeal. Anna follows Zuko's example tossing them some bread and watching as they crowd around her hand.

"They're so cute," she tells the prince with a laugh.

"Wait, until their mother gets here. It won't be cute anymore," he catches the look on her face. Bright eyes, gold like honey or amber in the sun, and a smile on her pink lips that exposes the slight gap in her teeth. Her glasses sit on the edge of her nose, until she pushes them up glancing at him. He turns away, bright pink blooms on his face.

"Thanks for this," she says, breaking the silence. Zuko glances at her in surprise before a soft smile graces his face. He doesn't look much like a prince here. He's just a boy, feeding ducks like his mother taught him too. It is that boy that Anna loves most of all.

* * *

><p>It is a memory that blossoms behind her closed eyes. A warm hearth, red cozy armchairs, a lion banner hanging above the mantel and in the corner is a large tree covered in shiny baubles. A rush of excitement travels through her body, forcing her legs down the stairs. No one had ever gotten her a gift. Ron is there, a large red sweater on his body, a huge R in the middle of it. He hands her one too, a deep maroon with a gleaming, gold H knitted onto the center. It's ghastly but her body sinks into the soft wool. There are presents beneath the tree. Books, from Hermione. Chocolate and candy, from the twins and Neville. She has never been happier. She has never wanted to cry more. The last gift is wrapped in brown parchment, a note tucked into the twine. Use it well, it reads.

She rips off the wrapping paper, more curious than ever. Inside is a cloak that feels like water beneath her fingers. It looks like a star plucked from the sky, a slivery material that shines.

She pulls the silver cloak around her shoulders, hearing Ron's gasp.

"Bloody hell, you're invisible," he chokes out. Anna looks down, her body beneath her shoulders is completely gone from sight but she feels it moving beneath the layer of starlight. An invisibility cloak.

She does not have to open her eyes to know the cloak is in the room.

* * *

><p>She starts lessons in the spring. The schools in the capital are not enough to please her mother and father. They get her a private tutor instead, a woman named Sakiko. It seems an expense too big for them to afford but her mother reminds her that their exile was lifted. At first, Anna does not know what to think of the woman. Sakiko is stern faced with deep lines making up the folds of her face. Anna does not think a smile comes easily for this woman but she is pleasantly surprised by her deep laugh. Her amber eyes are soft beneath the rough timber of her voice.<p>

"I'm going to show you anything until you learn how to breath properly," a stern glare is sent Anna's way as she opens her mouth to respond.

"That little huffing noise you make is not breathing. You sound like a dying 80 year old man." Sakiko stands her bones popping slightly as she walks towards Anna. Her hands pull Anna's back straight until it aches. But she learns. The posture come easier and her breathing slower, deeper until she can feel the fire moving insider her. It is wonder and awe and the fear of it lessens.

Her mother is in charge of her in the afternoons. They walk to the palace libraries together, finding a corner far away from others. She

cherishes these afternoons she spends listening to her mother describe lands far away and inconceivable, the differences in dialect in the Earth Nation, the stars that light the sky under the North Pole. Her mother tells her of the war, of the Fire Nation citizens that died protecting their land, of the murder of civilians, of the Air Nation Army.

"I know it's scary but you have to know. One day this war will be over and all of this will be just memory. It'll be easy to forget than why we fought and what they did to us."

Anna does not want to know of war. She has lived through one and lost everything.

* * *

><p>The light in the hall wavers, shadows dancing on faceless bodies. Some litter the ground, others hidden behind gaping holes in the wall. The stones are charred, tables sits as rubble on the ground. Anna can only see one face, a pale gray, shriveled, with red eyes as slits. In his hand is a thin stick that points straight at her. A gold light streaks through the air and the wand flies. He drops backward, falling to the ground gracelessly in a final resounding thud. Anna catches the wand.<p>

* * *

><p>"Why do we have to do this?" Anna asks, exhausted as she tries to get away from her mother's fussing hands. Anna's robes are pulled off her soon, the pins put away as the seamstress leave with piles of embroidered silk. The festival is weeks away and they act as if it comes tomorrow.<p>

"It's important. We're back after fifteen years. We have to make an impression," her mother explains, patiently. She looks at Anna's tired face, the annoyance that lingers in her brow and sighs.

"You know when your father and I first met he took me to the art museum near here. When he came to pick me up, he had that ridiculous training outfit on, the brightest red I'd ever seen. He made up these stories for all the paintings in the museum, stories that didn't even make sense. When we went to dinner later that night, I told him that I had studied art under Soami. I thought he was going to die when I told him."

"Dad's so dumb," Anna says laughing as she imagines her dad guiding her mother around. His hands gesturing wildly, a Cheshire grin on his face and her mother trying to keep the laugh out of her voice.

"Why do you think I married him?"

"Well, grandpa told it was because of his big di-" her voice is muffled by her mother's hand. Laughter echoes in the room, high pitched, as Anna is tackled to her bed by her mother. It is hard to breath as she tries to escape her mother's wiggling fingers. It is even harder to muster up anything but happiness.

The settle next to each other, black hair splayed out in halos around their heads, amber eyes glancing at each other.

"I love you," her mother says softly. Anna's heart squeezes, tightly, uncontrollably.

"I love you too."

* * *

><p>Dawn approaches as Anna sits on her bed. The gaudy gold ring is heavy in her hand, the cloak covers her invisible legs, and the wand rests on the edge of her bed. She knows what they are, what they can do. There power is stronger here, echoing through the air, lighting her body on fire. Master of Death. It is not a title she wants.<p>

"Who are you?" she asked, hands trembling as she moves toward the man. His feet are up on her desk, boots caked thickly with mud. The legs of his pants are thick with a slick black oil and his hands are stained an even darker black.

"We were not meant to meet this soon," his voice is hoarse, thick with disuse. He moves swiftly and gracefully for an old man. His coat pulled around his broad shoulders, and she sees the gleam of gold buttons. It's an officer's uniform but not one of theirs.

"Anna Potter," the name sounds wrong, "you are a very persistent girl."

"Iâ€¦I"

"A second life is not easily gained but neither are those three items."

"I don't want it." He stares at her, eyes empty before he laughs.

"A first then. Don't worry too much about it, sweets. It'll all sort out," he smiles harshly, all teeth and no eyes. He's gone when she blinks.

* * *

><p>Firstly, thank you to everyone who favorited, reviewed or followed. I really appreciate it. I hope this chapter fills your expectations.

Second, to answer a question given by a reviewer. Anna will have a significant effect on Zuko's journey. However, she was raised in the Fire Nation and was taught to believe all of their propaganda just as much as the other children. This story is as much about Anna finding her own path, redeeming her nation, and making sure she lives up to her past life as it is about her and Zuko's relationship.

3. Love Me Lights Out

Nobody sees what we see
>They're just hopelessly gazing

XO, BeyoncÃ©

* * *

><p>The gold leaf itches on her face. Anna's hands yearn to scratch it off, to take off the suffocating silk dress, to get rid of the uncomfortable shoes. A glance at her mother's stern face stills her hand.<p>

Soft lanterns light the path towards the inner courtyard. Fire lilies bloom under the low light, bright red petals that shimmer with thin green stems. Her mouth curls into a smile as she sees them. The nobles are dressed in their finest silks, masks covering their faces as they enter into the ballroom. Some wear masks of bright pinks and greens shaped like butterflies, others look like freshly plucked birds. Anna tries not to laugh.

A gasp escapes her mouth as she enters the main room. Soft wisps of fire float in the air shaped like lilies. Fire lilies cover the archways and columns. Streamers of lilies are tied to the crystal chandelier in the middle of the room, forming a giant flower on the ceiling. Anna has never seen anything so beautiful. The sweet smell of summer hangs in the room.

General Iroh and his son sit closest to the Fire Lord. The crown prince is handsome. His mouth pulls into an easy boyish grin that reaches his warm eyes. Anna can easily see why the girls in the Fire Nation are in love with him. He carries himself proudly and yet his eyes meet the servants' as he thanks them. She thinks of Sirius and what he said once. _If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals. _Prince Lu Ten would be a wonderful Fire Lord.

She greets Fire Lord Azulon first, ducking into a low bow. The Fire Lord is tall and old, his white hair shining brilliantly underneath the firelight. He glances at her with a blank indifference, a crease forming between his eyes as he glances at the lightening scar on her face. His eyes dart away towards her mother when she looks up. He is warm and gracious and everything a Fire Lord should be but it doesn't feel right. Her skin feels tight under his gaze and her parents shift uncomfortably. They are simply toys for this man to play with. Anna does not like it.

Anna wonders away catching the eye of General Iroh. She watches in slight awe as he makes the flames dance like butterflies around him. It is trick, seemingly simple but one that only a master can do. He laughs, loudly and fully, at her gasp of awe.

"Come here, child," he motions, his voice soft like the honeyed wine they drink at dinner. It is only when she is near him that he recognizes her.

"You look just like your grandfather," he smiles, the kind of smile you only see once in a lifetime and remember always.

"Thank you," Anna says. It is the first time someone has not spit an insult at her grandfather's memory.

"Are you a firebender," he asks.

"Yes," she hesitates, "Prince Zuko has been helping me and my Sifu Sakiko." He does not look surprised at her mention of the prince. He motions for her to sit and she glances hesitantly towards her

parents. They are still speaking to the Fire Lord.

"Do you like tea, my dear?"

She nods. His smile brightens. Iroh asks her about Zuko, about her home in Shu Jing and listens as she describes her tiny village, her friendship with the prince, and the warm fire that lives in her.

"How do you like the Capital?"

"It'sâ€¦different."

"Different is one word. I'd say it's dangerous, wouldn't you?" Iroh says no more on the Capital, a knowing gleam in his eyes as he casts a glance towards his father. Anna does not like it. He distracts her with tales of dragons. She's heard the rumors that he killed the last of the mighty beasts but, that is not the story he tells her.

"As I walked up the stairs, carrying my small flickering flame, it goes out. I panic, of course. The sun warriors behind me jeer and laugh. I am surely to die. The last step looks bigger, a mountain to climb but I do it. The masters, they spoke of, are not men. Out of one cave comes a glittering red beast, scales as large as my body. Out of the other, a deep blue beast with scales like sapphires. Dragons. They circled, dancing around each other like new lovers. Then I knew. I performed the Dance of the Dragons, though it looked silly with just me. When I was done, they breathed out a flame so bright, so beautiful that it is hard to describe. It was like looking at the stars at night, the sun rising painting the sky with streaks of color."

"You killed them though."

He winks and takes a long sip of tea.

* * *

><p>It is late in the night. Everyone is fully watered and fed, an air of lethargy hanging over the ballroom. Anna is sneaking in spiced chocolates when Zuko spots her. Her mouth is stuffed full, and she greets in a mumbled voice that has him laughing.<p>

"You could've asked one of the servants to take them to your room," he tells her, a mocking grin on his face.

"I didn't know. We didn't have these growing up." She shrugs her shoulders, brow creasing as she sets the chocolate down. Zuko stills her hand calling to the waiter that passes them. There are three boxes, stuffed with the finest sweets sent to her room.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," he takes her by the hand. A motion that is done so smoothly, so casually that Anna is slightly blindsided. There's a girl watching them as Anna is led to table. The sharp grin and same shade of gold eyes gives her away.

Princess Azula is beautiful. It is the first thing Anna notices about her, the second is the sneer that pulls her lips downward. Her eyes are cold steel that cut through the air. She has none of the softness that Zuko does. This girl is all Lord Ozai.

"Who's this, Zuzu? Your new toy?"

"Azula," Zuko says his voice tight. Anna's face burns under the girls gaze. There is something ugly that lurks in Azula's eyes.

"I'm Anna Zoeller." Her last name hangs in the air before Azula laughs, sharply. It is a laugh that is fake, that is meant to belittle Anna. She knows this game already. Draco had played it well, better than this princess could.

"Zoeller? You mean your grandfather is the crazy old man that nearly destroyed the fire nation? No wonder Zuko hangs out with you."

"Crazy or not, he managed to do what your grandfather couldn't."

The princess glares, a ugly thing that distorts any beauty she had. She leaves in a steely silence. Zuko's eyes are wide as he stares at the space his sister left behind.

"Sorry," Anna says, at last.

His hand in hers, the familiar smell of cedar wood and heat.

"Azula's never walked away before."

A smile, boyish and soft. A smile that Anna would fight to see. A smile that devours her world.

They sit in silence, her head on his shoulder as her eyes slip closed slightly. She listens to the soft tones of piano, a violin chasing after its melody. The song plays in her head like a loop. A waltz that she's danced a lifetime ago.

"You look beautiful," Zuko says. Anna turns a bright red beneath her face paint. She knows the scar that covers half her face is ugly, lightening that travels from one corner feathering out. But she knows that her smile is pretty and her eyes a nice color and her hair a wavy, black mess.

"Thanks," she whispers back.

"Did you see that lady wearing the blue peacock feathers," there's a laugh in his voice. They sit for hours mocking the other guests. Zuko, at one point, stands up and reenacts a colony governor's fall as he tried to bow to Lord Ozai. It has Anna in near tears.

There's a silence that falls over the room as Zuko walks back to his mother for the final dance. She finds it strange how formal the dancing is here, how rigid like its something to suffer through rather than enjoy. The whole capital's like that. Anna sees it, in the weariness of people's faces, the fear that blankets, news that comes from rumors. There's a shadow coming over their nation and she's not sure she wants to be here when it comes.

Some one pulls her out of her thoughts, sending her towards the dance floor where she stumbles into people until she comes to a stop.

Her father is there, his hand tight in hers.

"I want you to lead, just like I showed you." Her mouth falls open, protest on her lips.

"I couldn't possibly."

"I'm right next to you. I won't let anything happen. You know all the steps, Anna. Everything will be alright."

"I can't."

"You can," he looks earnest, proud. A wide grin on his face and his next words cut off as the music starts. Anna's world pivots and shakes. A tsungi horn shrieks, a flute shouts, someone on her left hisses as a heel hits the floor loudly. She steps forward, her foot in the air for a moment before the steps float out. Three steps forward, one back, a lift.

"Dad?"

"I'm here," his grip tightens.

Eight paces forward, a box, a spin. A roar of noise as the symphony grows louder. Twelve steps and they switch. It is Zuko's hand in hers now, his mother whisked away by her father in a shroud of red. The pressure is gone, replaced by a steadily growing confidence. Zuko stumbles as she leads but falls into step effortlessly afterwards. He lifts her, a quiet strength in his arms.

"Hi," she whispers. Her eyes shine.

"Hi." There's no fear now as they finish the dance.

She can do this.

* * *

><p>So this chapter is quiet continuous. The other chapters were setting the scene. The time jumps were because Anna is very much a child. The things she remembers most clearly are the things that had the most impact: leaving her home, finding Zuko, her parents and the Hallows. This chapter doesn't have much touching on her past life. As we progress, Anna's status as Master of Death will be thoroughly explained as will her finding of the Hollows and her death. Just be patient.<p>

By the way, reviews are always welcomed. I love reading your critiques, comments and questions. It helps me plan the story out and tweak events that I have already written out. Also, thank you to everyone who had favorited, followed and reviewed this story.

End
file.